

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

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FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9794

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMCONSUL ISTANBUL

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMCONGEN MILAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 14492

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, AV, TU, IT

SUBJ: TERRORIST ATTACK IN ISTANBUL

REF: STATE 212490

SUMMARY. AIRPORT SECURITY IS A MATTER OF IMMEDIATE CONCERN TO ITALIAN AUTHORITIES AND SECURITY AT ROME'S FIUMICINO IS GENERALLY GOOD AND SLATED TO IMPROVE SHORTLY. UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, EMBASSY PREFERS DELAY HIGH-LEVEL APPROACH TO GOI UNTIL MORE DEFINITE CONCLUSIONS HAVE BEEN REACHED ON POSSIBLE LAXNESS OF ITALIAN SECURITY IN RELATION TO THE TERRORIST ATTACK IN ISTANBUL. THERE ARE NUMBER OF UN-RESOLVED QUESTIONS ON WHICH EMBASSY REQUESTS GUIDANCE. END SUMMARY.

1. PAST EXPERIENCE

WITH AIRPORT TERRORISM, AND MOST RECENTLY THE POSSIBLE CONNECTION WITH TERRORIST ATTACK IN ISTANBUL, HAVE MADE AIRPORT SECURITY A MATTER OF CONFIDENTIAL

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IMMEDIATE CONCERN TO ITALIAN AUTHORITIES. EMBASSY AND

VISITING FAA AND OTHER USG OFFICIALS HAVE CONDUCTED CONTINUING DIALOG WITH GOI (PARTICULARLY AIRPORT OFFICIALS AND SECURITY OFFICIALS AT THE AIRPORT) AND US CARRIERS ON MAINTAINING AND IMPROVING AIRPORT SECURITY. AS A GENERAL PROPOSITION, THERE IS NO LACK OF AWARENESS OR CONCERN ON PART OF ITALIAN AUTHORITIES.

2. QUESTION OF GENERALIZED APPROACH ON AIRPORT SECURITY SUGGESTED REFTEL IS COMPLICATED BY AMBIGUITIES SURROUNDING WHAT DID OR DID NOT TAKE PLACE AS TERRORISTS PASSED THROUGH ROME ON WAY TO ISTANBUL. EMBASSY WOULD PREFER TO DELAY HIGH-LEVEL APPROACH TO GOI UNTIL MORE DEFINITE CONCLUSIONS HAVE BEEN REACHED RE POSSIBLE LAXNESS OF ITALIAN SECURITY PERSONNEL IN ISTANBUL ATTACK. UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, ITALIAN AUTHORITIES ARE LIKELY TO CONSIDER AN APPROACH BY EMBASSY AS INDICATION THAT USG BELIEVES TERRORIST WEAPONS WERE CONVEYED TO ISTANBUL IN CARRY-ON LUGGAGE AND THAT ITALIAN SECURITY PERSONNEL WERE AT FAULT FOR NOT DISCOVERING WEAPONS. IF SUFFICIENT INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE TO PERMIT USG TO DRAW FIRM CONCLUSIONS, EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE BEING PROVIDED WITH IT. AS FAR AS EMBASSY AWARE, AVAILABLE INFORMATION INDICATES THAT WHILE ITALIAN SECURITY MAY WELL BE AT FAULT IN THIS CASE, A NUMBER OF UNRESOLVED QUESTIONS MAY LEAD TO OTHER CONCLUSIONS.

3. REFTEL TRANSMITS TURKISH POLICE OFFICIAL'S STATEMENT THAT TERRORISTS HAD SAID AUTOMATIC WEAPONS WERE PLACED IN "LARGE LEATHER CARRY-ON BAG" AND THAT GRENADES HAD BEEN HIDDEN IN LARGE CANDY CANS AND, PRESUMABLY, ALSO PLACED IN THE SAME CARRY-ON BAG. ROME AIRPORT DOES HAVE BENDIX X-RAY DEVICES TO CHECK CARRY-ON LUGGAGE OF ALL PASSENGERS ENTERING "SANITIZED" TRANSIT AREA. WHILE IT IS POSSIBLE THAT EQUIPMENT WAS NOT WORKING SATISFACTORILY OR THAT TERRORISTS FOLLED ITALIAN SECURITY PERSONNEL CHECKING BAGGAGE, SECURITY AUTHORITIES HERE HAVE STATED QUITE POSITIVELY THAT THERE IS LITTLE CHANCE THAT AUTOMATIC WEAPONS COULD HAVE BEEN OVERLOOKED. THEY TOLD CHARLES CARRINGTON, VISITING FAA SECURITY EXPERT, AND EMBOFF THAT SECURITY PERSONNEL ARE PERIODICALLY TESTED BY CAREFULLY

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CONCEALED PLACEMENT OF A DISMANTLED PISTOL IN A CARRY-ON BAG AND THAT THE DISMANTLED PISTOL ALWAYS HAS BEEN DETECTED.

4. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE IS THE ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITY THAT THE WEAPONS WERE PLACED IN CHECKED BAGGAGE AND RETRIEVED AT THE YESILKOY AIRPORT. ITALIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE SUGGESTED TO US THAT TERRORISTS MIGHT HAVE OBTAINED WEAPONS DURING LENGTHY TIME BETWEEN THEIR

ARRIVAL IN ISTANBUL (3:55 P.M.) AND TIME OF ATTACK (ABOUT 8:30 P.M.) FROM THEIR OWN LUGGAGE, OR THAT OF COLLABORATORS TRAVELLING WITH THEM CHECKED ONLY AS FAR AS YESILKOY. THEY ALSO SUGGESTED THAT THE WEAPONS COULD HAVE COME FROM STILL OTHER COLLABORATORS ALREADY IN ISTANBUL. TURKISH POLICE HAVE ADMITTED REFTEL THAT THERE IS NO SCREENING OF TRANSIT PASSENGERS ENTERING TRANSIT LOUNGE AT YESILKOY.

5. RE PARA 3, REFTEL EMBASSY'S IMPRESSION OF FIUMICINO AIRPORT SECURITY IS THAT IT IS REASONABLY GOOD IF ALL SYSTEMS (BENDIX X-RAY, METAL DETECTORS AND REMOTE CONTROL TELEVISION) ARE WORKING WELL. CERTAINLY FIUMICINO HAS MORE AND BETTER ARMED GUARDS THAN US AIRPORTS. WE SUGGEST THAT CHARLES CARRINGTON (FAA/WASHINGTON) IS IN A BETTER POSITION TO GIVE AN EXPERT OPINION ON SECURITY AT FIUMICINO, ESPECIALLY IN THE TRANSIT AREA WHICH HE EXAMINED CLOSELY. CARRINGTON DISCUSSED POSSIBILITIES FOR COOPERATION WITH FAA SECURITY DURING HIS VISITS TO FIUMICINO. ITALIAN AIRPORT SECURITY AND FAA SECURITY ALSO HAVE BEEN AND ARE IN DIRECT CONTACT. EMBASSY HAS THE IMPRESSION THAT COOPERATION HAS BEEN GOOD AND THAT ITALIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE BEEN TAKING ADVANTAGE OF US KNOWLEDGE WHERE MOST USEFUL. FIUMICINO AIRPORT AUTHORITIES EXPECT TO HAVE COMPLETED SECURITY STUDY BY SEPTEMBER 15, 1976. THEY ALSO PLAN TO USE US MODEL AIRPORT SECURITY STUDY IN IMPLEMENTING TIGHTER SECURITY PROGRAM IN OCTOBER, 1976.

6. FOR DEPARTMENT: ACTION REQUESTED: PLEASE PROVIDE CONCLUSIONS ON ITALIAN RESPONSIBILITIES AND THEIR PERFORMANCE ON THEM IN THIS CASE.

7. FOR MILAN: AMCONGEN MILAN MAY WISH TO PROVIDE ITS CONFIDENTIAL

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ASSESSMENT OF AIRPORT SECURITY AT MALPENSA.BEAUDRY

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